

# WHEN MULTICHANNEL CONFERENCES BECOME THE NEW STANDARD

With the perspective to attend conferences physically again in the near future, will we move back to “Hybrid” Conferences (on-premises + on-line) or did a year of virtual-only bring innovations to the scene, such as the concept of Multichannel Conferences?



This article tells the story of one of the largest investment banks in the world that had to organize all of their conferences all-online in a matter of days. Using MAP Digital's MetaMeetings platform with the support of Raskenlund, their global attendees' virtual-only experience was a great success. In the aftermath, MAP Digital envisioned new opportunities going beyond the de-facto standard of the - by now well-known - “Hybrid” Conferencing model and have developed the concept of Multichannel Conferences where attendees AND speakers can choose how they want to attend the conference.

*“Our MetaMeetings platform allows both attendees and thought leader speakers to shape their own conference experience through various channels.”*

Speakers can present from the ballroom or via a Zoom. The MAP Team will mix these

files so that the remote and the live attendees get the same, integrated experience. *“MAP Digital was born hybrid over 20 years ago. The virtual-only phase taught us that content and attendees' engagement will come from many channels. We are expanding our MetaMeetings platform to build this new model for events.”* says Mary Ann Pierce - Founder and CEO. This is the story on how Multichannel Conferences were born and how it will become the most compelling approach towards conferencing in the future.

COVID-19 pushed an imaginary pause button for almost all business conferences and tradeshow in the world as mass events were forbidden in most countries. The companies organizing these events had no option to either reinvent themselves, rely on governmental support or close business altogether. But - as Churchill once said, ‘Never waste a good crisis’, - some companies grabbed this opportunity to catapult them miles ahead of their competitors, which brings us to the story of MAP Digital, who launched their first true multichannel conference platform, guided by Raskenlund's experienced Streaming Media consultants.

MAP Digital' MetaMeetings is the leading Enterprise SaaS event-platform for live and on-demand streaming conferences. For over 20 years they have deployed the total onsite digital infrastructure for one of the world's largest banks investment conferences, in which one conference has nearly 600 live sessions in four days.

Since 2000 in order to be compliant with the U.S. Security Exchange Commission, most public companies stream their presentations live. Thus, MAP Digital was born hybrid and built MetaMeetings to manage all the content onsite and online.

Offering an online alternative to your offline event, is what the industry calls ‘Hybrid Conferences’. But due to the pandemic, conferences had to go online-only, which means you can't even put your speakers on a stage.

For MAP Digital this meant they had to organize their massive 600 live sessions conference remotely, with nearly 2,000 speakers broadcasting themselves from their home computers. All this for the investment community, so that one can understand: failure was not an option. Uncertainties like ‘Can everyone hear me? Is my mic on?’ would be a disaster for a major corporation keynote at that level.

## Going Digital Only

*“We started from the assumption that by now, everyone can use at least one conferencing tool”, says Mary Ann Pierce. “We asked our speakers to use their preferred one to give their presentation. Our MAP Team would then capture and encode this video file and stream it live to our attendees using our MetaMeetings Conference Platform. This proved to be a simple and effective solution for both the speakers and attendees.”*



"So that is exactly what we developed," says Karel Boek, CEO at Raskenlund. "Speakers would connect through their own conferencing tools to MAP Digital operators. Those operators would then forward the video stream onto the MetaMeetings Conference Platform from where conference attendees could join and watch the sessions."

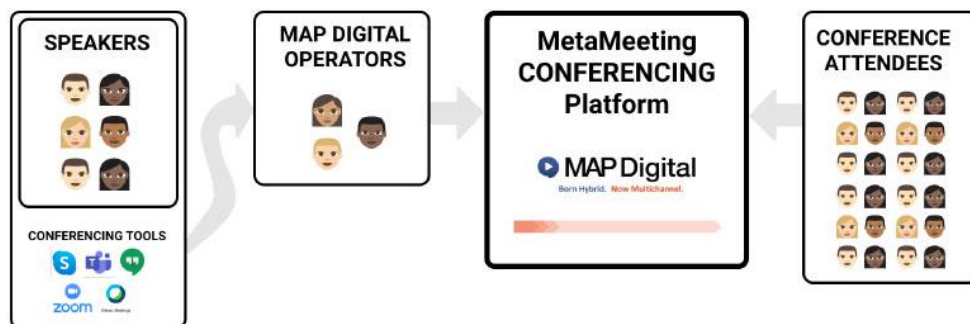
While this setup looks easy, behind the scenes an in-depth audit of the platform's streaming capabilities was done by Raskenlund professionals prior to building the solution.

With no room for downtime or failure, Amazon Web Services in combination with Wowza's streaming platform was chosen to guarantee High-Availability. Furthermore, failover servers were configured for both the streaming and the recording servers, to make sure that even when the streaming server would go down, a secondary system could continue to offer availability.

Adaptive Bit Rate or ABR, a technology that will reduce the bandwidth and lower the quality of a stream when your internet connection is bad or unstable, was implemented to make sure everyone could enjoy the sessions regardless of the quality of their internet connection.

## Ready, set, stream!

With the infrastructure and failovers in place, and many engineers tracking and monitoring everything that is happening, MAP Digital was ready to start the conference. Over a period of 4 days, 598 live webcasts were held in over 14 concurrent sessions hosting 2,000 speakers. The MetaMeetings platform had 60,000+ unique users. Through the platform the speakers received and provided answers to over 1,700 questions, and slides were available for viewing and downloading.



Throughout the live conference, attendees and speakers emailed the bank's conference managers with their positive feelings about the quality and simplicity of the MetaMeetings platform. "This has so far been the smoothest, easiest to navigate virtual conference platform I've used to date." is only one of the many positive quotes about the video streaming enhancements and user experience of the MetaMeetings conferencing platform.

## Multichannel Conferences via MetaMeetings: the start of a new era.

Although this conference was entirely virtual, it fostered innovation, which MAP Digital can now use to their advantage. When conferences with physical attendance are possible again, this MetaMeetings platform will allow presenters to stream their presentations straight into the conference halls. Panel discussions can be held with people on stage or calling-in through the video-conferencing tool of their preference. Questions can be asked both by the online and the physically present audience. And in case you don't feel like going out today; you can bring your laptop and attend using the WiFi signal at the poolside of your hotel. All attendees and speakers, onsite or on the Web now can use the MetaMeetings platform to personalize their conference experience.

For more than a year, a large number of businesses had to keep their employees at home. Loved by some, hated by others, companies were forced to implement remote working policies. Even when people can go back to their offices, it is likely that many companies will accept their employees to work from home, be it full-time or part-time (and if they don't, it will become a perk that prompts good employees to consider working for a competitor). Furthermore, with an ongoing debate of the impact of traveling on the global climate, and companies doing their best to become Carbon Neutral, the Multichannel Conference offers a great solution for those people living close by, and those having to travel half the globe.

This will be the start of a new era where, when talking about conferences, physical and virtual, in-person and on-line will go hand in hand. "We have learned so much from virtual only. However, we did not do it alone." MAP Digital relied on Karel Boek and his team at Raskenlund to ensure that the streams were delivered flawlessly to the global audience via AWS. "It is time to build a new model for events, but to do it well, you must partner with the best. That is why we chose Raskenlund to join us on our multichannel exploration," concludes Mary Ann Pierce. ■

Want to learn more about this case? Get in touch with [hello@raskenlund.com](mailto:hello@raskenlund.com) or [info@mapdigital.com](mailto:info@mapdigital.com)

## Largest Investment Banking Virtual Conference by The Numbers

598 live webcasts
14 concurrent session tracks
2,000 speakers
60,000+ unique users
170,000+ live and on demand webcast views
40,000+ slide presentation views
1,700+ questions asked

Larger view

## The Conference in Quotes

"This is the best run virtual conference I have attended. I love the website."

"Been a great conference and kudos to the tech team for setting up a very user-friendly website. It's been seamless."

"The conference is really amazing! Impressive to have video and slides next to each other. Site easy to navigate too."

"This has so far been the smoothest, easiest to navigate virtual conference platform I've used to date."

"Thank you so much for the flawless tech support for our presentation. Much appreciated!"

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"The conference was very well done, everything went off without a hitch for us, and we appreciate all the hard work that went into organizing this massive conference in a virtual setting."